



STATE REPRESENTATIVE SHERRY APPLETON



23rd DISTRICT 2008 SESSION REPORT

Spring 2008

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Another legislative session has ended in Olympia. It was a challenging session, but because we managed to clear many of the hurdles the state faced, it could also turn out to be one of the best sessions in years.

What challenges? For starters, a decline in projected revenue. A growing population with a growing demand for vital public services. A ferry system in crisis. Spiraling health-care costs. A floating bridge that might not float much longer. Overall, an aging and overworked infrastructure.

If those were the challenges, what made the session a success? I'll talk about some of the answers to that question in this session report, but I'll give a quick mention here to a balanced, no-new-taxes budget, an ending reserve of better than \$800 million, a long-overdue raise for school employees, some good news for ferry customers, and a number of public safety enhancements.

There were more successes, and of course some disappointments as well. I hope you'll take a look at this brief report and, if you see something you'd like to know more about, please contact me or my legislative assistant. The Legislature may have adjourned, but my work on your behalf continues year 'round. Thank you for allowing me the privilege of being your voice in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Sherry Appleton

QUALITY OF LIFE

That's really what it all comes down to, isn't it? We want to improve and maintain the quality of our lives. We think about that when we develop personal habits, choose a mate, pick a career, decide where to live. And in large part, the main thing we expect from our public servants is that they'll understand how important our quality of life is, and work to protect it. That's one reason I and the other West Sound legislators stood up to the International Speedway Corporation when they wanted *us* to pay for *their* NASCAR track here in Kitsap County. That's why I've focused so much of my energy on straightening out the mess that our ferry system has become. And it's the reason the Kitsap Victories scattered throughout this newsletter are so important, even though they involve relatively small amounts of money compared to our state budgets as a whole. In a sense, you can look at this entire newsletter as a report on the Legislature's work on quality-of-life issues. How are we doing?



EDUCATION

In raw dollars, the Legislature drove nearly two and a half million additional state dollars to Kitsap County's five school districts in this year's supplemental operating budget. A good portion of that will go to teachers and staff as cost-of-living increases called for in Initiative 732. (It's not enough, in my opinion, falling short of the three percent that the voters approved, but in this tight budget year, we just couldn't make it happen.) That's money that will circulate again and again in our communities – a great investment. We also secured funding to improve school libraries, enhance student learning opportunities and reduce class sizes. Statewide, the Legislature acted this year to improve the Washington Head Start program, expand career and technical education options, revise an inadequate math curriculum, and remove barriers that have often made it difficult or impossible for college students to transfer credits from one school to another.

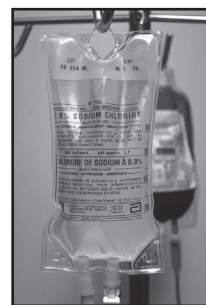
KITSAP VICTORY

This year's operating budget allocates \$212,000 to the Higher Education Coordinating Board for a study laying the groundwork for a baccalaureate university center that would serve degree-seeking students on the Kitsap, Key and Olympic peninsulas.



HEALTH CARE

No one should go bankrupt just because they get sick. As I mention elsewhere in this mailer, I'm still fighting to achieve health care for all. In the meantime, though, the state continues to make progress on many health-related fronts. This year we passed legislation to speed implementation of the 2007 Health Insurance Partnership act, which will help small businesses offer affordable insurance to low-wage workers. We authorized the Insurance Commissioner to review proposed rate increases on individual health-insurance policies and disallow them if they aren't warranted. The Legislature set stringent new standards for persons hoping to call themselves mental-health counselors, and we passed a new law offering improved protection to consumers purchasing long-term care insurance.



FERRIES

Whether we commute daily to get to work or just sail over to Seattle now and then to catch a Mariners game or pick up visitors at the airport, ferries are a given here on the Peninsula. Without dependable ferry transportation, the bridge is out; the road is closed. And without affordable fares, we're sometimes forced to choose between boarding the boat or paying for some other necessity of life. For too long, the system's ailments seemed to be something that everyone recognized and talked about, without making much headway. It was too big. It was too complicated. It was too expensive.

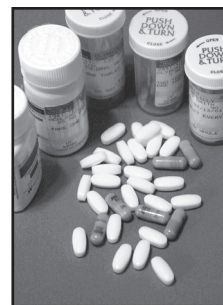
A desire to help solve the ferry crisis was one reason I joined the Legislature in 2005, and in the years since then we've seen measurable progress. By continuously pounding the ferry drum, we've come far enough that today, even lawmakers from places far removed from Puget Sound understand the importance of dependable, affordable, safe ferries. This year my caucus announced a five-point ferry plan – an action plan that says "Here are the steps we will take to right the system." I think it's a good plan. By 1) controlling costs, 2) overhauling management, 3) focusing on service and safety, 4) building for the future and 5) insisting on strict accountability, we're going to transform the nation's largest ferry system into something it used to be: a model for the world's marine highways.



This year, two of my key ferry goals for the session became reality. My bill to end "lock-out" – which prevents two vehicles from paying with a single fare card – was incorporated into the supplemental transportation budget, and we reinstated a legislative instruction for the ferry system to consider discounts for frequent users. Also within the last few months Gov. Gregoire has named talented individuals to the top spots in Washington State Ferries and the Department of Transportation. The Legislature at last freed up resources to build a half-dozen new boats. We're just getting started on our five-point plan, but we know where we need to be and we're moving in the right direction.

A MONEY-SAVING REMINDER

Every Washington state resident who does not have prescription drug coverage or whose prescription insurance is inadequate can save significantly on medicines purchased at hundreds of Washington pharmacies, thanks to the legislatively-created Washington Prescription Drug Program. There is no income test for enrollment, and you can save as much as 60 percent on generics and 20 percent on name-brand drugs. To enroll and receive your free program membership card, visit www.rx.wa.gov, or call 1-800-913-4146.



HELPING FAMILIES OWN AND KEEP A HOME

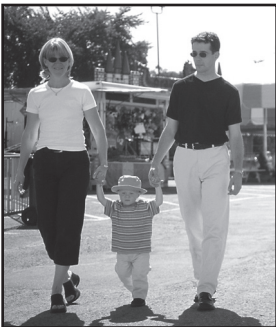
Luckily, Washington hasn’t been hit quite so hard as many states by the national subprime-mortgage meltdown, but that doesn’t mean we haven’t been touched. Foreclosures, among the most devastating experiences that families can face, are happening to our friends and



neighbors here in Kitsap. The Legislature hasn’t singlehandedly solved the problem, but this session did produce a significant group of housing-finance laws, ranging from counseling services for borrowers to limits on pre-payment penalties, regulations for mortgage brokers, and assistance for families at risk of foreclosure.

PROTECTING WASHINGTON’S FAMILIES

This year the Legislature continued its efforts to enact effective – and constitutional – new laws to help Washington residents feel, and be, safer. The bills we sent to Gov. Gregoire are designed to increase campus safety, protect domestic-violence victims, expand the use of ignition interlocks in drunk drivers’ cars, come down hard on sex offenders who fail to register, and get a handle on the criminal gang activity that is affecting growing numbers of Washington communities.



KITSAP VICTORY

The Legislature this session added a quarter of a million dollars in funding for the Veterans Environmental Academy, with much of that money earmarked to add Olympic College to the program. The Academy trains military veterans from the war-on-terrorism era for “green-collar” jobs in environmental restoration, construction and conservation.



KITSAP VICTORY

Additional funds for Kitsap County school districts in the supplemental operating budget:

- Bainbridge – \$265,000
- Bremerton – \$384,000
- Central Kitsap – \$788,000
- North Kitsap – \$400,000
- South Kitsap – \$626,000



THIS WAS A VERY GOOD SESSION, BUT . . .

that doesn’t mean it was a perfect one. Like every other lawmaker, I came away with a few disappointments. In a representative democracy, of course, things take time, and patience is often rewarded when the goal is a worthy one, so I’ll continue to work on these issues during the interim.

- For two years I’ve sponsored legislation that would devote a portion of the state fuel tax strictly to our ferries – without increasing the tax itself. This is an idea whose time is coming.
- I’ll continue to recommend that we take the state Transportation Commission out of the ferry business entirely and hand its marine responsibilities to a Ferry Advisory Committee instead. Let the Transportation Commission deal with roads and tolls, and leave the ferries in the able hands of a more representative citizen board that would include members who really know what it’s like to live in a ferry-dependent community.
- The WestSound Wildlife Rehabilitation Center is an under-appreciated asset that could, with reasonable state support, become one of the best and most effective in the nation. I’ll keep working to win the Center a place in the budget.
- I’m also very disappointed that modest grants to the Poulsbo Marine Science Center and the Kitsap County Well-Baby Program were last-minute budget casualties. These are valuable community resources that need and deserve support, and I’ll continue to advocate for them.
- The body-piercing phenomenon has exploded during the past decade or so, and it makes no sense to me that a business that involves invasive and potentially dangerous procedures remains largely unregulated by our state. My bill to establish reasonable standards and practices, enforceable by the Department of Health, has come close to passage, but has not quite made it to Gov. Gregoire’s desk. This is a genuine public health issue and I won’t give up on this one.
- Health care for all: I’m pleased to see that just about every serious presidential hopeful has acknowledged that, one way or another, America has to move toward a future that includes health care for everyone in our society who needs it, period. Even leaving aside the argument that it’s just the right thing to do, the fact is that routine and preventive health care are far less expensive to us, as taxpayers, than providing emergency care at the last minute. My Washington Health Care Trust bill has not passed, yet. But I’m going to continue my efforts to extend coverage to every Washingtonian, *while preserving everyone’s right to choose his or her health-care provider and leaving medical decisions in the hands of patients, doctors and nurses – not government agencies.*